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La Consentida as an Early Formative Mesoamerican Village

The Mesoamerican Early Formative period (approx. 2000–1000 cal BC) was a time of social transformation. In the preceding Archaic period (approx. 7000–2000 cal BC), mobile hunter-gatherers had moved seasonally across the landscape and experimented with a few domesticates, such as squash, maize, beans, and root crops. By the end of the Formative, Mesoamericans lived in permanent towns and cities, relied on agriculture, and were ruled by powerful royal dynasties. The Late Archaic and Early Formative periods set the stage for these dramatic changes, but the exact timing of and the possible connections between transitions to sedentism, agriculture, and social complexity are debated in Mesoamerican archaeology (Blake and Clark 1999; Clark 2004a; Clark et al. 2007; Killion 2013; Lesure and Blake 2002; Love 2007; Webster 2011). Traditionally, sedentism has been seen as beginning with the Early Formative and as hastening ethnolinguistic divergence among previously mobile and fluid cultural groups (Flannery and Marcus 2003; Hopkins 1984; Winter et al. 1984). Arguably, the extreme terrain in parts of Mesoamerica would tend to accentuate cultural and language differences among increasingly sedentary communities. Some recent scholarship suggests, however, that certain populations remained semi-mobile during the Early Formative, despite interactions with their agrarian neighbors (e.g., P. Arnold 1999; Rosenswig 2011) and that contact and exchange among Formative period communities was more complex than implied by models of sedentary isolationism (Blomster 2004; Pool et al. 2010). Although some researchers (Coe 1981; Coe and Flannery 1967; Sanders and Webster 1978) have argued that

the economic basis for sedentism was maize agriculture (supplemented with other crops such as squash and beans), others (e.g., P. Arnold 2009; Blake et al. 1992; Clark et al. 2007; Smalley and Blake 2003; VanDerwarker 2006) propose that maize in coastal zones was a feasting food that, along with other, limited-use horticultural products, supplemented a broad diet consisting mostly of wild resources collected in estuarine or floodplain settings. The origin of Mesoamerican social complexity is another topic of disagreement. The timing of initial complexity differed among regions, with areas such as Mazatán apparently experiencing hierarchical hereditary inequality by about 1600 cal BC (Clark 1991, 1997; Hill and Clark 2001). In comparison, the Gulf Coast region likely did not see such formalized hierarchies until later in the Early Formative, and regions of the Soconusco outside of Mazatán did not do so until the Middle Formative (1000–400 BCE) (Love 2002; Pool 2007). Traditional definitions of social complexity focus on such hereditary hierarchies (Feinman and Marcus 1998; Spencer and Redmond 2004), while a smaller group of researchers has considered the ways in which complex heterarchical distinctions influence social landscapes (e.g., Crumley 1995, 2004; McIntosh 1999; Pauketat and Emerson 2007; Vega-Centeno Sara-Lafosse 2007:169). My purpose in enumerating these discussions is not to choose sides in all cases, but rather to demonstrate that the archaeology of the Early Formative period is very much an ongoing discussion.

Early Formative sites are found in diverse ecological settings across Mesoamerica (figure 1.1). Many coastal sites occur near estuaries, especially in the Soconusco region (Blake and Clark 1999; Clark 2004a; Lesure 2009, 2011a). Despite decades of research in various environmental and geographic settings, large areas (such as much of Mexico's Pacific coast) remain enigmas regarding Early Formative history. This circumstance has resulted in explanatory models for Early Formative social transitions that are based on research in only a few regions. Worldwide, the establishment of villages (and the dietary and social implications of that process) presents major archaeological research problems, but no consensus exists as to its causes (e.g., Banning 2003; Bar-Yosef and Belfer-Cohen 1989; Binford 1968; Boyd 2006; Byrd 1994; Choe and Bale 2002; Flannery and Marcus 2012; Joyce and Henderson 2001; McClung de Tapia and Zurita-Noguera 2000; Weisdorf 2005). In the hopes of addressing these issues, I have asked with the research summarized in this book what relationships existed between settlement, subsistence, and social organization at La Consentida, an Early Formative period site in coastal Oaxaca, Mexico.

The majority of the investigations at La Consentida (under the aegis of the La Consentida Archaeological Project, or LCAP) have taken place during seven field and laboratory seasons totaling over twenty months of research (Hepp 2011a, 2011b, 2014, 2015; Hepp and Joyce 2013; Hepp and Reiger 2014; Hepp et al. 2017). Based on seven Early Formative AMS radiocarbon dates (table 1.1), which provide



FIGURE 1.1. Map of key sites mentioned in the text

a calibrated date range of 1950–1525 cal BC, when reported with 2σ probability and 1885–1565 cal BC, when reported with 1σ probability, La Consentida represents the earliest well-dated Formative period site discovered thus far in Oaxaca (Hepp 2011a, 2015, in press; A. Joyce 2010:71–72). The contexts from which these radiocarbon samples were collected are stratigraphically controlled and are unequivocally associated with ceramics, mounded earthen architecture, and formal mortuary contexts that I interpret as early cemeteries. Dated deposits include well-preserved hearths sealed between layers of platform fill, burned food adhering to a jar fragment from a midden, and bone collagen from a human burial (see table 1.1, figure 1.2, chapter 3). With the exception of an eighth sample, which was likely contaminated, the radiocarbon dates are quite consistent across the site. More specific details about the dated contexts (and all strata excavated during the LCAP) can be found in chapter 4 and appendix 1. These radiocarbon dates are older than those for other Early Formative Oaxacan deposits of the Tierras Largas (1400–1200 BCE, or 1650–1500 cal BC) and Lagunita (1500–1100 BCE, or 1750–1350 cal BC) phases (table 1.2). Some (e.g., Flannery and Marcus 1994:375) have proposed that the Espiridión phase predates Tierras Largas, though it has produced no radiocarbon dates and is now in question as truly distinct from Tierras Largas. Radiocarbon dates also establish La Consentida as contemporary with the Barra phase (1900–1700 cal BC) of the Soconusco. Comparison of these phases demonstrates that La Consentida has yielded some of Mesoamerica's

TABLE 1.1. AMS radiocarbon dates from La Consentida (calibrated with IntCal 13 curve by OxCal 4.3.2). Reported with both 1σ and 2σ probability and rounded to five-year increments.

<i>AMS radiocarbon date (uncalibrated)</i>	<i>2σ calibration</i>	<i>1σ calibration</i>	<i>Material / lab number</i>	<i>Context</i>
3480 \pm 60 (A.Joyce 2005:17)	1950–1640 cal BC	1885–1740 cal BC ($p = .64$) 1715–1695 cal BC ($p = .04$)	Wood carbon (Beta-131037)	Floor or occupation layer
3480 \pm 40	1900–1690 cal BC	1880–1835 cal BC ($p = .24$) 1830–1745 cal BC ($p = .45$)	Carbon-rich sediment (AA92453)	LC09 A-F4 hearth in Platform 1
3445 \pm 35	1885–1665 cal BC	1870–1845 cal BC ($p = .13$) 1810–1800 cal BC ($p = .02$)	Wood carbon (AA101267)	LC12 A-F19 occupation layer
3435 \pm 45	1885–1635 cal BC	1780–1690 cal BC ($p = .54$) 1875–1845 cal BC ($p = .11$) 1815–1800 cal BC ($p = .03$) 1780–1680 cal BC ($p = .54$)	Carbon-rich sediment (AA101269)	LC12 E-F10 probable hearth in midden
3420 \pm 35	1880–1840 cal BC ($p = .08$) 1825–1795 cal BC ($p = .04$) 1785–1625 cal BC ($p = .84$)	1760–1660 cal BC	Carbonized food (AA104836)	Burned food adhering to pottery from LC12 H-F4-s2 midden
3360 \pm 45	1755–1535 cal BC	1740–1710 cal BC ($p = .10$) 1700–1610 cal BC ($p = .58$)	Carbon-rich sediment (AA92454)	LC09 B-F15 hearth in Platform 1
3335 \pm 20	1690–1600 cal BC ($p = .76$) 1585–1530 cal BC ($p = .20$)	1665–1610 cal BC ($p = .65$) 1575–1565 cal BC ($p = .03$)	Collagen from human femur (PRL-5423A/B [H6])	Direct date on human remains from burial B12-I14 using XAD purification ¹
2435 \pm 35	755–680 cal BC ($p = 0.22$) 670–610 cal BC ($p = 0.11$) 595–405 cal BC ($p = 0.63$)	730–690 cal BC ($p = .14$) 660–650 cal BC ($p = .02$) 545–410 cal BC ($p = .52$)	Carbon-rich sediment (AA101268)	Above domestic structure floor ²

¹ Refer to chapter 3 for a discussion of the methods used to process this human bone date.

² This date is considered suspect, based on its shallow deposition and proximity to modern plant roots. The sample may have been contaminated or may represent a burning event subsequent to site abandonment. It also occurs at a plateau on the calibration curve.

earliest known ceramics, mounded earthen architecture, and cemetery contexts (table 1.2). The site thus provides a unique opportunity to address debates in Early Formative period studies. As I discuss in chapters 8 and 9, the early dates complicate current models for the adoption of ceramics in Mesoamerica (e.g., Clark and Blake 1994), and suggest that there may have been two contemporaneous pottery traditions in the region by as early as 1900 cal BC.

SITE AND REGIONAL BACKGROUND

The lower Río Verde Valley is located on the western Oaxaca coast (figure 1.3). Although sediment cores indicate maize cultivation and anthropogenic land clearance going back into the late Archaic, archaeological research since the 1980s has suggested that the region was sparsely populated until the Middle Formative period (Goman et al. 2005, 2013; A. Joyce 1991a; Joyce and Goman 2012). Contrary to recently published reports, however, it is not true that there was “virtually no occupation during the Archaic or Early Formative period” (see Rosenswig 2015:135). The region is best known ethnohistorically for the site of Tututepec, the capital of a Postclassic period (800–1521 CE) Mixtec empire (Joyce et al. 2004; Levine 2007, 2011; Spores 1993). Before the arrival of the Mixtecs, the area saw several periods of centralization and destabilization with a settlement and political hierarchy centered at Río Viejo, the seat of short-lived Terminal Formative (150 BCE–200 CE) and Late Classic period (500–800 CE) polities (Barber and Joyce 2007; A. Joyce 1991a, 2005, 2006, 2010, 2013a).

Prior to recent research at La Consentida, little was known about Early and Middle Formative sites in the lower Río Verde Valley. La Consentida was initially discovered by archaeologists during a regional reconnaissance in 1986 (A. Joyce 1991a:85, 116–17). The site is located about 6.5 km from the modern Pacific coastline and falls within the boundaries of the Chacahua National Park. La Consentida is named after a small town located between the park and the local stretch of Mexico’s Highway 200. During the Early Formative period, the site was probably positioned within about 4 kilometers of an open bay (Goman et al. 2005, 2013; A. Joyce and Goman 2012). Based on artifacts and earthen architecture visible at the surface, La Consentida covers at least 4.5 ha and is dominated by an earthen structure (Platform 1) measuring approximately 300 × 100 × 5 m.

Preliminary work at La Consentida in 1988 (A. Joyce 1991a:406, 2005; Winter 1989) formed part of the Río Verde Formative Project and included surface collections, sediment sampling, and excavation of a single test unit. A charcoal sample from this excavation, which was performed atop the western edge of Platform 1, produced an AMS radiocarbon date of 3480 ± 60 (Beta-131037; wood charcoal; $\delta^{13}\text{C}$

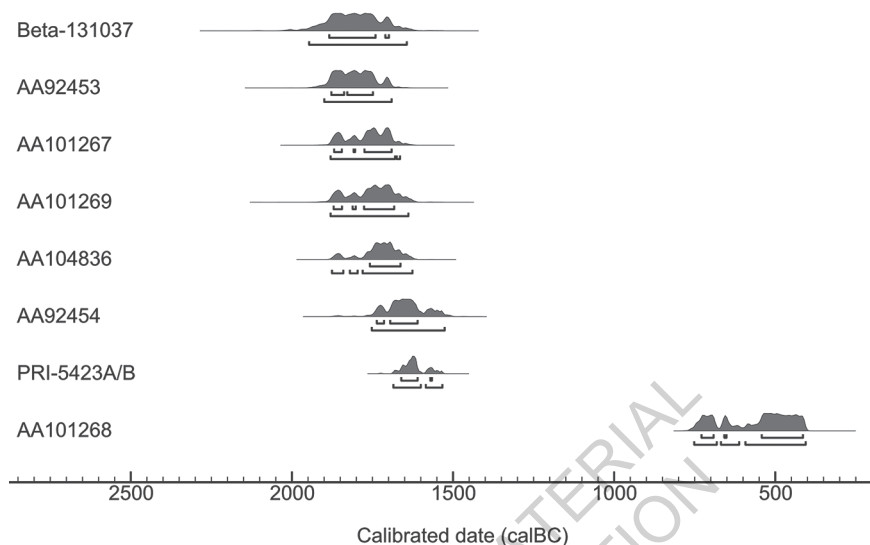


FIGURE 1.2. AMS radiocarbon dates from La Consentida (calibrated with IntCal 13 curve by OxCal 4.3.2). Reported with both 1 σ and 2 σ probability and rounded to five-year increments

= -24.4‰) or 1950–1640 cal BC (table 1.1; A. Joyce 2005; Winter 1989). This early date surprised the research team (who had expected to find Late or Middle Formative period deposits) and sparked interest in further investigations at the site. The 1988 pilot research recovered eroded medium brown ware sherds indicating a vessel assemblage of bottles, bowls, jars, and possibly platters and braziers. Also recovered were informally produced gray obsidian percussion fragments. These fragments seem to be largely debitage or randomly fractured waste material rather than purposeful flakes or formal tools. They evince a lithic industry focused on making sharp cutting edges regardless of tool shape, rather than producing material-conserving blades. In 2000, Arthur Joyce and colleagues (2009a:347, 2009b:522–25) carried out a surface survey and GPS mapping project at the site. The results of this mapping project are being revised with new total station mapping data, as discussed in chapter 3.

PROJECT SCOPE AND OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

To date, the LCAP has focused on identifying relationships between transitions in sedentism, subsistence, and social organization at an Early Formative period site. Chapter 2 frames this research within the context of key debates regarding

TABLE 1.2. Comparison chronology of Mesoamerican Early Formative period phases

<i>Phase name</i>	<i>Site/region</i>	<i>Uncalibrated date</i>	<i>Calibrated date</i>
Tlacuache	Oaxaca coast (La Consentida)	1600–1350 BCE	1950–1500 cal BC
Barraa (Clark 1994:544)	Soconusco	1600–1450 BCE	1900–1700 cal BC
Purrón (Clark and Gosser 1995; MacNeish et al. 1970:21)	Tehuacán Valley	1600–1400 BCE	1900–1680 cal BC
Espiridión (Flannery and Marcus 1994:375)	Valley of Oaxaca	1600–1400 BCE est.	1900–1650 cal BC est.
Ojochi (Cyphers and Zurita-Noguera 2012:146)	Gulf Coast	1550–1400 BCE est.	1750–1550 cal BC
Poxb (Brush 1965:194; Clark and Cheetham 2002:314)	Guerrero coast (Puerto Marquez)	1500 BCE est.	1750 cal BC est.
Early Ajalpan (estimate based on Clark and Gosser 1995)	Tehuacán Valley	1400–1100 BCE est.	1680–1350 cal BC est.
Lagunita (Reyes González and Winter 2010:151; Zeitlin 1978)	Isthmus	1500–1100 BCE	1750–1350 cal BC est.
Locona (Clark and Cheetham 2002:295)	Soconusco	1450–1300 BCE	1700–1550 cal BC
Tierras Largas (Drennan 2003a:363; Marcus and Flannery 1996:75)	Valley of Oaxaca	1400–1200 BCE	1650–1500 cal BC est.

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TABLE 1.2—continued

Phase name	Site/region	Uncalibrated date	Calibrated date
Bajío (Cyphers and Zurita-Noguera 2012:146)	Gulf Coast	1400–1300 BCE est.	1600–1500 cal BC
Cruz A (Blomster 2004; Spores 1984:18–19; Winter 1992)	Mixteca Alta	1400–1150 BCE	1600–1400 cal BC est.
Ocotillo (Joyce and Henderson 2001)	Honduran coast	1400–1100 BCE	1600–1350 cal BC est.
Ocos (Lesure 2011b:13)	Soconusco	1300–1150 BCE est.	1550–1400 cal BC
Tulipan (P. Arnold 2003:31)	Gulf coastal highlands	1300–1150 BCE	1550–1400 cal BC est.
Chicharras (Hirth et al. 2013)	Gulf Coast (San Lorenzo)	1250–1150 BCE	1500–1400 cal BC
Capacha (T. Kelly 1980; Mountjoy 2006)	Colima	1200–900 BCE	1450–1150 cal BC est.
El Opeño (Mountjoy 2006; Oliveros Morales 1974; Oliveros Morales and de los Ríos 1993)	Michoacán	1200–900 BCE est.	1450–1150 cal BC est.
San José (Marcus and Flannery 1996:75)	Valley of Oaxaca	1200–900 BCE	1450–1150 cal BC est.

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TABLE 1.2 — continued

Phase name	Site/region	Uncalibrated date	Calibrated date
Cherla (Lesure 2011b:13)	Soconusco	1150–1050 BCE est.	1400–1300 cal BC
Cotorra 1-A (Bachand 2013:14)	Chiapa de Corzo	1150–1050 BCE	1400–1300 cal BC est.
San Lorenzo A (Coe and Diehl 1980a)	Gulf Coast (San Lorenzo)	1150–950 BCE est.	1400–1200 cal BC
Cruz B (Blomster 2004; Spores 1984:18–19; Winter 1992)	Mixteca Alta	1150–850 BCE	1400–1100 est.
Coyame (P. Arnold 2003:31)	Gulf coastal highlands	1150–850 BCE	1400–1100 est.
Golfo (Reyes González and Winter 2010:151; Zeitlin 1978)	Isthmus	1100–800	1350–1050 cal BC est.
Cotorra 1-B (Bachand 2013:14)	Chiapa de Corzo	1050–1000 BCE	1300–1250 cal BC est.
Cuadros (G. Lowe 2007)	Soconusco	1050–950 BCE est.	1300–1200 cal BC

^a The beginnings of the date ranges for the Tlacuache and Barra phases differ due to discrepancies in calibration techniques. Specifically, Tlacuache phase dates have been calibrated with the updated IntCal 13 curve by OxCal 4.3.2 (Reimer et al. 2013). The longer error ranges of most Barra dates, relative to Tlacuache dates, also complicate comparison (see table 1.1; Clark 1994:app. 3). I estimate that the Barra and Tlacuache phases had roughly contemporaneous beginnings, though the latter remains a longer phase pending possible division into subphases.

^b Brush (1965:194) reported a radiocarbon date from Puerto Marquez of 2940 ± 130 BCE, and an initial Pox Pottery date of 2440 ± 140 BCE. Clark and Cheetham (2002:314) revised this date to approximately 1500 BCE on the basis of stylistic similarities with Tierras Largas.

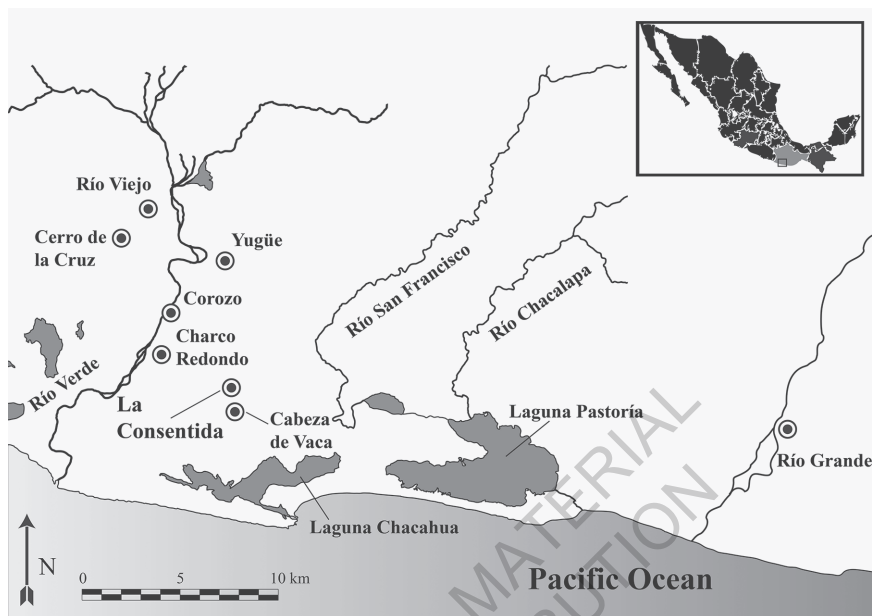


FIGURE 1.3. Map of key archaeological sites in Oaxaca's lower Río Verde Valley

these socioeconomic changes as they relate to the archaeology of Early Formative period Mesoamerica. Chapter 2 also discusses some material correlates for identifying sedentism, agriculture, and social complexity in the archaeological record. The LCAP has included surface survey, mapping, ground-penetrating radar, large-scale excavations, and laboratory study. The mapping phase updated preexisting information and revealed the dimensions and locations of Platform 1 and several earthen substructures atop it. Refer to chapter 3 for a discussion of research methods, terminology, and mapping results. Chapter 3 also presents several kinds of maps to help readers visualize the site's dimensions and spatial organization. At later sites in the region, platforms similar to La Consentida's Substructures 1–7 often supported domestic architecture and/or public buildings (Barber 2005:140–41, 235; A. Joyce 1991a:292). On the basis of this comparison, horizontal excavations atop these mounds have been one focus of the LCAP. Excavations also sought refuse middens, largely as a way to extend the regional ceramic sequence and to locate floral and faunal remains to aid dietary reconstruction. Chapter 4 presents a discussion of the occupational history at La Consentida. This information is meant to complement the specific descriptions of excavated deposits found in appendix 1. I pay particular attention in both sections to strata relevant for understanding La

Consentida's occupational history. Wherever possible, I discuss excavated contexts chronologically, using radiometric, stratigraphic, and ceramic data as supporting evidence for their relative dates of deposition. Where chronological relationships are less clear, I organize context descriptions stratigraphically and by operation area.

For interpretations of excavation and laboratory data specific to each component of the project's research questions, refer to chapters 5, 6, and 7. Chapter 5 addresses evidence for domestic mobility and sedentism. Chapter 6 presents evidence for La Consentida's subsistence economy. Chapter 7 offers evidence for social organization at the site. These discussions focus on architectural stratigraphy indicating shifting patterns of communal labor, iconography, evidence for personal adornment, and mortuary and ritual deposits. Iconography relevant to discussions of social organization includes figurines suggesting practices of bodily adornment and the expression of diverse social identities. Figurine analysis is an important step in interpreting social organization and identity in ancient Mesoamerica (Blomster 2009; Cyphers Guillén 1993; Faust and Halperin 2009; Hepp and Joyce 2013; Hepp and Rieger 2014; Lesure 1997a, 1999a; Marcus 1998, 2009). Ceramic figurines recovered from diverse contexts at La Consentida, including human burials, indicate an emphasis on the human form and especially on the depiction of women. Ceramic musical instruments from the site are among the earliest known in Mesoamerica and appear to predate similar instruments of the Tierras Largas phase (Hepp et al. 2014; Ramírez Urrea 1993:143). See chapters 7 and 8 for results of figurine and musical instrument analysis. Chapter 8 discusses evidence for inter-regional interaction and trade, including patterns identified through the study of ceramic vessel forms and decorative styles and obsidian X-ray fluorescence (XRF) sourcing data. Various lines of evidence suggest interaction with diverse regions including the Valley of Oaxaca, Central Mexico, the Gulf Coast, and possibly West Mexico.

In chapter 9, I summarize the evidence from each of the main components of the LCAP research agenda, consider how these social phenomena were interrelated, and present the final interpretations of the project to date. I conclude that La Consentida presents good evidence for a transition toward sedentism during site occupation, which appears to have lasted for about two and a half centuries during the Early Formative period. The community's diet was diverse but likely included more maize than did that of contemporaneous peoples of the Soconusco (Blake et al. 1992; Chisholm and Blake 2006) and Gulf Coast (Killion 2013). Dental pathologies, ground stone tools, and ceramic vessel styles suggest a possible shift from an emphasis on maize in beverage form to the processing of maize flour with stone manos and metates. In general, however, the Early Formative occupants of La Consentida did not eat the heavily maize-reliant diet of coastal Oaxaca's later

pre-Hispanic peoples (Joyce et al. 2017). In terms of social organization, the La Consentida community appears to have been heterarchically complex, with perhaps the first glimmers of the ascribed hierarchies of the kind better documented in later Mesoamerican contexts.

As mentioned above, appendix 1 presents descriptions of excavated deposits useful for understanding the occupational history of La Consentida as well as the contexts from which carbon dates and specific finds were recovered. Appendix 2 contains detailed information about the ceramic vessel forms at La Consentida, as well as within-site patterns of pottery discard. These ceramics represent a previously unknown assemblage in the lower Río Verde Valley and thus require description as a new complex and phase in the regional ceramic sequence. Tlacuache-phase pottery (named in honor of a modern village located near the site) includes various types of jars, conical and semispherical bowls, bottles, and a few tecomates (neckless ceramic jars). In its current form, the Tlacuache phase is long (approximately 250 to 450 years, depending on if and how the dates are calibrated), presents a diverse ceramic assemblage, and may reflect some chronological variation. On the basis of future analysis, the phase may eventually be subdivided.

PROJECT SIGNIFICANCE

La Consentida was occupied during some of the most revolutionary social transformations in the history of the Americas. Archaeologists working in many areas of the world debate the causal mechanisms behind sedentism, agriculture, the demise of egalitarianism, and the establishment of social complexity (e.g., Banning 2003; Boyd 2006; Choe and Bale 2002; Joyce and Henderson 2001; McClung de Tapia and Zurita-Noguera 2000). Studies of Formative period Mesoamerica are especially rife with debates over the timing of and causal relationships between these transitions. Positions in these debates correlate strongly with regional research foci, suggesting that a diverse material record inspires diverse interpretations (P. Arnold 1999, 2009; Blake et al. 1992; Blake and Clark 1999; Clark and Cheetham 2002; Flannery and Marcus 2003; Marcus and Flannery 1996). These different explanatory models also reflect major theoretical positions of their day, such as the ecological functionalism of the 1960s and 1970s, and the practice-based approaches of the 1990s and 2000s. La Consentida is uniquely suited to inform these debates for several reasons. First, the site's probable location near an open bay, in contrast to the estuarine environments of most coastal Early Formative sites, makes its ecological setting somewhat unique (Goman et al. 2005, 2013; Mueller et al. 2013). Second, because La Consentida was apparently abandoned by the late Early or early Middle Formative period, excavations

at the site have exposed broad areas of early deposits rather than narrow windows through Classic or Postclassic period overburden. Third, the site's earthen architecture suggests communal labor efforts and perhaps the origins of social hierarchy associated with organizing work parties.

On a regional level, the LCAP represents a unique opportunity to expand understandings of ecological conditions and social organization at one of the earliest known villages on the Pacific coast of Mexico. Because La Consentida was apparently occupied *before* the development of local estuaries and the expansion of the Río Verde floodplain, it can provide information about settlement, subsistence, and social organization in the valley before it was intensively occupied during the late Middle Formative (A. Joyce 2005, 2010:180–95). The regional ceramic chronology (table 1.3; A. Joyce 2010:16) has never before included information for the Early Formative or early Middle Formative periods. With the newly identified Tlacuache phase (see appendix 2), the LCAP has expanded this regional chronology and promotes greater chronological depth of regional ceramic analysis and interregional comparison than has been possible previously. Similarly, ceramic iconography from the site permits a more deeply diachronic study of changing styles of decorated pottery, figurines, and musical instruments than has been possible before (e.g., Hepp 2007; Hepp et al. 2014; Hepp and Joyce 2013).

More broadly, research at La Consentida relates to general anthropological concerns, such as how Mesoamerican peoples negotiated the novel social and ecological conditions of increasingly sedentary and agrarian communities (Banning 2003; R. Joyce and Henderson 2001; R. Kelly 1992; R. Pearson 2006). Early Formative villages were occupied during major social transitions involved in the establishment of Mesoamerica (which may be defined, depending on the context, as a cultural and geographical entity or as a network of interaction and shared practices), but relatively few sites comprise the period's known material record (Blake and Clark 1999; Blomster 1998; Clark 1991, 1994; R. Joyce 2004b; Kirchhoff 1943; Lesure 2004). Identifying archaeological evidence of Early Formative period settlement practices, subsistence, and social organization, and refining explanatory models for their transformation, will be one of the most productive ways to address key debates in Mesoamerican studies in the future (see chapter 2). La Consentida, located in a region practically unknown in Early Formative archaeology, offers an opportunity for comparison with better-known areas to assess the applicability of current models for social transformation beyond the specific regions in which they have been developed. It is my hope that work at La Consentida can also help to redefine the role of Mexico's Pacific coast in the Early Formative roots of Mesoamerican culture.

In this book, I argue that transitions in settlement, subsistence, and social organization at La Consentida were intimately linked. Accelerator Mass Spectrometry

TABLE 1.3. Lower Río Verde regional ceramic sequence with uncalibrated radiocarbon dates (see A. Joyce 1991, 2010)

<i>Phase</i>	<i>Period</i>	<i>Date</i>
Yucudzaa	Late Postclassic	1100–1522 CE
Yugüe	Early Postclassic	800–1100 CE
Yuta Tiyo	Late Classic	500–800 CE
Coyuche	Early Classic	250–500 CE
Chacahua	Late Terminal Formative	100–250 CE
Miniyua	Early Terminal Formative	150 BCE–100 CE
Minizundo	Late Formative	400–150 BCE
Charco	Late Middle Formative	700–400 BCE
?	Late Early–Middle Formative	1350–700 BCE
Tlacuache	Early Formative	1600–1350 BCE

(AMS) radiocarbon dates from multiple, secure contexts demonstrate that the site's ceramics, mounded earthen architecture, and formalized mortuary contexts are among Mesoamerica's first. As I will discuss in the following chapters, Mesoamerica is too diverse for research at a single site to "lay to rest" ongoing debates about the Early Formative. Evidence from La Consentida does have the potential to impact those debates, however, as the site represents a unique example of the socioeconomic transformations that took place in an Early Formative village. Before discussing the evidence from the site in detail, I will first use chapter 2 to examine the different theoretical approaches and explanatory models applied to Early Formative period archaeology.